

Contact: David Glasgow
(615) 783-1300

Computer skills open new horizons for senior workers in Northwest Tennessee

DRESDEN, Tenn., March 31, 2010 - Congressman John Tanner made it official at a ribbon-cutting ceremony today in Dresden, the new computer learning center for older adults in Northwest Tennessee is open for business.

The idea for developing a computer lab for seniors came last summer when an older client of Northwest Tennessee Human Resource Agency (NWTTHRA) found a good job opportunity with the local affiliate of a national home and garden store. According to the agency's Senior Aides Director Melinda Goode, "He had the skills necessary for the job in the garden department. But, he was unable to complete the required online application because he was unfamiliar with computers."

"He's not the only one," she said.

Tanner said, "Computers have become an indispensable part of everyday life for nearly everyone now days. They provide access to great resources for almost any challenge. But, for a generation that grew up without computers and email they can also present a new kind of barrier to everyday social interaction and job opportunities."

Betty Eason, another area retiree, tells a similar story, "Two years ago my daughter gave me her old computer to use when they bought a new one, but I was so afraid of it I never touched it or even thought about using it. Even the very sight of it gave me shivers of intimidation so I covered it up with my dishtowels so as not to even have to look at it."

"I knew there had to be a way to help them overcome this barrier to employment," Goode said.

"We opened the training center in January 2010 and have already had sixty-five participants. Fifty-nine said in their individual employment plan that they need computer training to compete in the workforce," explained Goode.

Eason said, "At that first session I was surprised and comforted that there were others in the class who were as inexperienced as I. As we began working through the program together my excitement grew as I learned to use my mouse, keyboard, e-mail, and when I learned to search the Internet."

"I just knew my daughter would fall out when she received her first e-mail from me! I dusted off the old computer my daughter had given me with the very dishtowels that I had once used to hide it," Eason said. "My grandchildren were amazed at what all I had accomplished and can now do for myself."

In addition to the long term benefits of the new lab, NWTTHRA Executive Director John Bucy said there were a number of immediate benefits to the community as well.

"A local painter had been out of work but has picked up another job as a result of his efforts on the computer lab. Computers and specialized tables were bought from our locally owned office products store and set up by the local computer company. Finney's Floor Service was awarded the bid to install carpet," Said Bucy. "Each is another example of how Recovery Act funding like this can have a big impact on the community."

PHOTOS of students, including Ms. Eason, studying at the computer lab are available online:

<http://picasaweb.google.com/glasgowdavidl/BettyEason?feat=directlink>

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender. To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (800) 795-3272 TDD (615) 783-1397.